

Los Angeles Times

Premiere: Blues musicians ZZ Ward, Fantastic Negrito team for 'Cannonball'



Singer, songwriter and guitarist [ZZ Ward](#) has managed to find a connective thread that runs from traditional blues and R&B to contemporary hip-hop. See her bluesy versions of songs from Drake, Kendrick Lamar, Childish Gambino, Tyler the Creator and other rap word figures. She exploited that ability on her 2012 debut album, "Til the Casket Drops," with guest appearances by Lamar, Freddie Gibbs, Ali Shaheed Muhammed and others.

But with her sophomore album, "The Storm," released in June, the pendulum swings back more toward influence of the blues she felt growing up in Roseburg, Ore., where she joined her first band at age 12, playing alongside her musician father.

The Times is premiering a new video for the blues-steeped song "Cannonball," which features the song's co-writer, Oakland blues and hip-hop artist [Fantastic Negrito](#), who earlier this year took home the Grammy Award for contemporary blues album for his "Last Days of Oakland," dueting with her in a musical dialogue over a relationship that veers, in classic blues fashion, from intoxicating to toxic.

"It's been such a great experience collaborating with Fantastic Negrito," Ward said in a statement. "He lives in his artistry and plays music with such sincerity, it's very inspiring."

Rather than simply intertwining voices in harmony, Ward, 31, and Negrito, 49, bring the different sides of this romance to life in back-and-forth verses.

"I can't quit, I need help, set me free," she sings. "Shoot me up 'cause you know that I'll drop." For his part, Negrito voices his role in the dysfunctional proceedings: "When you was hungry/Girl, you came knockin' at my door, yeah/I fed you misery 'til you kept comin' on back/And comin' on back for more."



The session in Hollywood to shoot the new video, Negrito told *The Times* recently, "was great. ... I like this version better [than the studio recording]. It's more stripped down, more raw. I like stuff stripped down. ...I'm a big fan of that. It's what attracted me to Delta [blues] music when I first started listening to it. I thought, Man, it's so punk rock, in a way. It's so stripped down and raw and naked and has this sense of urgency."

Ward's Amy Winehouse-adjacent swagger contrasts effectively with his languid rock-blues drawl, and she adds another level of musical desperation to the mix with her blues harp solo. Her other guests on "The Storm" are Fitz of Fitz and the Tantrums, and blues-rock guitarist-singer Gary Clark Jr.

They took their collaboration to a national television audience recently with their live performance of "Cannonball" on "Late Night With Seth Meyers."

Ward, who made her debut at the Coachella Valley Music and Arts Festival in 2014, will be mounting a tour next year that opens Jan. 30 in Salt Lake City, stopping in 25 cities en route to a homecoming finale in L.A. scheduled for March 11 at the Fonda Theatre in Hollywood.